

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0923
AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL LENINGRAD IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 08881

E.O.11652:GDS
TAGS: EAIR, CASC, UR
SUBJECT: DOWNED KOREAN AIRLINER: MURMANSK TALKS

REF: (A) HELSINKI 1217, (B) MOSCOW 8646, (C) MOSCOW 8688

1. FOLLOWING IS REPORT OF RUECKERT, DPO LENINGRAD, ON
OFFICIAL DISCUSSIONS WITH DEPUTY DIRECTOR CONSULAR
DEPARTMENT, USSR MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, NIKOLAY
GRIGOR'YEVICH REZNICHENKO AT MURMANSK AIRPORT CONCERNING
RELEASE OF CAPTAIN, KIM CHANG KYU, AND NAVIGATOR, LEE
KEUN SIK, OF DOWNED KAL AIRCRAFT.

2. KAL PASSENGERS AND CREW WERE LANDED IN MURMANSK IN
TWO SOVIET FLIGHTS ARRIVING FROM KEM AT APPROXIMATELY 10
P.M. AND 10:30 P.M. APRIL 23. FIRST SOVIET FLIGHT ARRIVED
AT MURMANSK SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVAL OF PANAM RECOVERY
AIRCRAFT AT MURMANSK AIRPORT INDICATING THAT SOVIET
FLIGHTS FROM KEM WERE AS EARLIER INDICATED, (REFTEL C)
TIMED TO ARRIVE MORE OR LESS "SIMULTANEOUSLY" WITH PANAM
FLIGHT.

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3. U.S. AND JAPANESE DIPLOMATIC OFFICIALS FIRST LEARNED
OF DETENTION KAL CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR FROM KAL CO-PILOT
CHA SOON DOH SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVAL FIRST SOVIET AIRCRAFT
FROM KEM AT MURMANSK. AS A RESULT OF CHECK OFF PROCEDURES
OF KAL PASSENGERS AND CREW (PARA 3 REFTTEL A) U.S. AND
JAPANESE DIPOFFS WERE ABLE TO ESTABLISH AT OUTSET THAT ALL

OTHER KAL PASSENGERS AND CREW WERE PRESENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR.

4. FIRST SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION TOOK PLACE JUST AFTER ARRIVAL SECOND MURMANSK AIRCRAFT. NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY AND AIRPORT OFFICIALS WERE PRESENT BUT ALL SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION FROM SOVIET SIDE DURING ENTIRE PERIOD IN MURMANSK WAS CARRIED OUT BY REZNICHENKO, AND ON OTHER SIDE, BY JAPANESE EMBASSY FIRST SECRETARY, NOMURA, AND LENINGRAD CONGENOFF RUECKERT. OTHER TWO JAPANESE DIPLOMATS WHO ARRIVED IN MURMANSK ON PANAM AIRCRAFT (EMBASSY ATTACHE SHIRAISHI AND LENINGRAD CONGEN VICE CONSUL TAMAKI) PERFORMED OTHER CONSULAR FUNCTIONS AT AIRPORT. REZNICHENKO HAD NOTE TAKER.

5. IN HIS INITIAL PRESENTATION REZNICHENKO:

-- OFFERED LATE DINNER TO KAL PASSENGERS AND CREW AT AIRPORT.

-- INDICATED, IN RESPONSE TO DIPOFFS REQUESTS TO VIEW BODIES AND ESTABLISH IDENTIFICATION THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SOVIET HEALTH CODES, DECEASED HAD BEEN PLACED IN LEAD COFFINS WHICH WERE ALREADY SEALED AND PLACED IN WOODEN COFFINS.

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-- AND PROPOSED SIGNING OF "AKT" TO FORMALLY TRANSFER KAL PASSENGERS AND CREW AND ALL OF THEIR BAGGAGE TO PANAM CAPTAIN. HE DID NOT VOLUNTEER INFORMATION, BUT, IN RESPONSE TO QUERY, REZNICHENKO INDICATED THAT KOREAN DIPLOMATIC POUCHES ALSO WOULD BE TURNED OVER.

-- ALSO IN RESPONSE TO QUERY, REZNICHENKO CONFIRMED THAT KAL CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR WERE BEING DETAINED IN KEM "PENDING COMPLETION BY SOVIET INTERROGATORS OF INVESTIGATION CONNECTED WITH THE VIOLATION OF USSR AIRSPACE BY KOREAN AIRLINES AIRCRAFT." BOTH RUECKERT AND NOMURA EXPRESSED IMMEDIATE SURPRISE AND THEIR MOST SERIOUS CONCERN AT THIS NEWS. RUECKERT REFERRED TO MFA OFFICIAL KAPITSA ASSURANCES TO EMBASSY IN MOSCOW THAT ALL PASSENGERS WOULD BE RETURNED (REFTEL B) AND NOMURA SAID ASSURANCES HAD BEEN GIVEN BY SOVIET PREMIER KOSYGIN TO JAPANESE AGRICULTURAL MINISTER IN MOSCOW THAT ALL REPEAT ALL 111 (SIC) PERSONS ABOARD KAL AIRCRAFT WOULD BE RETURNED. BOTH STATED DETENTION WAS SERIOUS NEW TURN WHICH WOULD REQUIRE THEIR CONSULTATIONS WITH RESPECTIVE EMBASSIES. NOMURA ALSO STRONGLY PROTESTED PRIOR SEALING OF COFFINS REMARKING THAT THIS SHOWED LACK OF RESPECT FOR DEAD AS WELL AS

VIOLATION NORMAL CONSULAR PRACTICES WHICH ALLOW FOR
POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION OF ACCIDENT VICTIMS.

6. AKT NOTED PARA 5 ABOVE WAS DE FACTO TRANSFER STATEMENT
WORDED AS FOLLOWS: "IN CONNECTION WITH THE AGREEMENTS
REACHED APRIL 23, 1978, AT THE AIRPORT AT MURMANSK,
PASSENGERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CREW OF THE SOUTH KOREAN
AIRCRAFT ACCORDING TO THE ATTACHED LIST, WERE TRANSFERRED
TO THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AIRLINE COMPANY PAN AMERICAN
(USA) AS WELL AS TWO COFFINS WITH BODIES OF THE DECEASED
PASSENGERS (NAMED). ALSO TRANSMITTED WERE ALL OF THE

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AMCONSUL LENINGRAD IMMEDIATE

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PERSONAL EFFECTS AND BAGGAGE OF THE PASSENGERS AND OF THE
CREW." REZNICHENKO SAID HE WOULD ACCEPT SIGNATURE OF THE
AKT BY PANAM CAPTAIN, KAL CO-CAPTAIN, AND NEXT RANKING
CREW MEMBER (PARK TAE SIK) OR ALTERNATIVELY BY JAPANESE
AND U.S. DIPOFFS. RUECKERT AND NOMURA REFUSED CONSIDER
SIGNING AKT PENDING CONSULTATION WITH THEIR EMBASSIES ON
RELEASE KAL CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR.

7. ALTHOUGH IMMEDIATE PHONE CONNECTIONS WITH REPRESENTATIVE
EMBASSIES IN MOSCOW WERE DEMANDED, SOVIETS
OFFERED ONLY ONE TELEPHONE WHICH THEY SAID HAD ONLY NON-
MUNICIPAL LINE AVAILABLE. THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE DELAY IN
GETTING CALL THROUGH TO EMBASSIES AS WELL AS CONSTANT
THREATS OF INTERRUPTION OF LINE.

8. FOLLOWING CONSULTATION WITH DCM MATLOCK AND EMBASSY

OFFICER WEISZ, RUECKERT TOLD NOMURA THAT U.S. SIDE HAD NO OBJECTION TO PANAM CAPTAIN SIGNING AKT, PROVIDED IT WAS STRAIGHTFORWARD TRANSFER STATEMENT, BUT THAT U.S. WOULD WANT MAKE FURTHER ORAL PROTEST TO SOVIETS ON CONTINUING DETENTION CAPTAIN AND CREW. AFTER CONSULTATION WITH
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HIS OWN EMBASSY NOMURA CONCURRED IN THIS LINE INDICATING HE INSTRUCTED MAKE ADDITIONAL STRONG ORAL STATEMENT ON PRIOR SEALING OF CASKETS WHICH JAPANESE VIEWED AS SERIOUS MATTER VIOLATING CONSULAR PROVISIONS AND JAPANESE RESPECT FOR DEAD. NOMURA ALSO HELD OPEN OPTION TO ORDER CASKETS OPENED DESPITE PRIOR SEALING. AKT SIGNING WAS THEN DISCUSSED PRIVATELY BY DIPOFFS WITH PANAM CAPTAIN AND TWO KAL CREW MEMBERS INVOLVED ALL OF WHOM EXPRESSED NO OBJECTION TO SIGNING FACTUAL STATEMENT ALONG LINES PRESENTED BY REZNICHENKO. PANAM DOCTOR AND NOMURA THEN INVESTIGATED COFFINS AND DETERMINED THAT THEY HAD BEEN WELDED SHUT SO THAT LENGTHY METAL CUTTING, PROBABLY BY ACETYLENE TORCH, WOULD BE REQUIRED OPEN THEM AND SUBSEQUENT SERIOUS PROBLEM OF RESEALING WOULD BE INVOLVED. NOMURA ACCORDINGLY AGREED NOT TO INSIST ON OPENING CASKETS AT MURMANSK.

9. IN SECOND MEETING WITH REZNICHENKO (ABOUT 3 A.M. APRIL 23) RUECKERT AND NOMURA OPENED BY ASKING WHETHER SOVIET SIDE, IN CONSIDERATION OF EARLIER ASSURANCES GIVEN TO U.S. AND JAPANESE GOVERNMENTS, NOW HAD CHANGED ITS POSITION CONCERNING RELEASE KAL CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR. REZNICHENKO RESPONDED BY REPEATING SOVIET FORMULATIONS ON DETENTIONS (PARA 5 ABOVE) BUT ADDED WORD "TEMPORARILY" SO STATEMENT READ, "SOVIET AUTHORITIES TEMPORARILY DETAINING CAPTAIN AND NAVIGATOR PENDING COMPLETION OF INVESTIGATIONS CONNECTED WITH VIOLATION OF SOVIET AIR SPACE BY KAL AIRCRAFT." DIPOFFS THEN EXPRESSED THEIR DEEP SURPRISE, REGRET, AND DISAPPOINTMENT WITH THIS SOVIET POSITION, PROTESTED CONTINUING DETENTION AND EXPRESSED THEIR EXPECTATION THAT DETAINED KAL CREW WOULD BE "IMMEDIATELY RELEASED AND REPATRIATED." BOTH AGAIN CITED SOVIET ASSURANCES TO THEIR RESPECTIVE
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GOVERNMENTS. REZNICHENKO MADE NO RESPONSE BUT NOTE TAKER TOOK DOWN STATEMENT. NOMURA THEN ADDED STRONG EMOTIONAL STATEMENT ON PRIOR SEALING OF COFFINS STRESSING JAPANESE CUSTOM HONORING DEAD BY GIVING THEM AT LEAST

RESPECT OF PROPER IDENTIFICATION. HE STRESSED THIS WAS NO LIGHT MATTER TO JAPANESE AND ASKED THAT HIS STATEMENT ALSO BE DULY NOTED IN PROTOCOL. REZNICHENKO NOTED HIS ACQUIESCENCE TO NOTE TAKER. DIPOFFS THEN TOLD REZNICHENKO THAT PANAM CAPTAIN AND KAL CREW INVOLVED, BUT NOT DIPOFFS, WERE PREPARED SIGN AKT TRANSFERRING REMAINING PASSENGERS AND CREW. FINAL FORMULATION WAS THEN WORKED OUT IN PRESENCE OF ALL SIGNERS. FINAL VERSION CONTAINED SENTENCE THAT THERE WERE NO CLAIMS FROM SIDE OF PASSENGERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CREW. (FULL TEXT AKT BEING REPORTED SEPTEL). IN VIEW CLAIMS SENTENCE, DIPOFFS INSISTED THAT EACH PASSENGER SELECT HIS OWN BAGGAGE FROM TWO UNLOADED SOVIET AIRCRAFT AND PERSONALLY PLACE IT ON AIRPORT TRANSPORT CART TO ASSURE THAT ALL OF THEIR EFFECTS HAD IN FACT BEEN RETURNED. SOVIET SIDE AGREED TO THIS PROCEDURE.

10. IN FOLLOW-ON TELEPHONE DISCUSSION WITH EMBASSY DCM MATLOCK AND EMBASSY OFFICER WEISZ DISCUSSING ABOVE EVENTS, DECISION WAS MADE ON HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATION NOT TO FURTHER DELAY RETURN FROM MURMANSK OF STRETCHER CASES, INJURED AND REMAINING EXHAUSTED KAL PASSENGERS AND CREW. PREPARATIONS ACCORDINGLY WERE MADE TO ENSURE THAT ALL PERSONAL BAGGAGE WAS RETURNED AND PROVISIONS WERE MADE TO BOARD PANAM AIRCRAFT. ALSO CONSIDERED, BUT SECONDARY TO HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS WERE (A) STATEMENT BY MURMANSK AIRPORT OFFICIAL THAT HELSINKI AIRPORT, WHICH BEING HELD OPEN FOR SPECIALLY AUTHORIZED NIGHT FLIGHT, WAS THREATENING CLOSE DOWN, AND (B) FACT THAT PANAM AIRCRAFT HAD FAULTY STARTER EQUIPMENT WHICH DID NOT

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AMCONSUL LENINGRAD IMMEDIATE

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PERMIT ENGINE SHUTDOWN AND AIRCRAFT ACCORDINGLY WAS
USING UP ITS FUEL.

11. PANAM AIRCRAFT DEPARTED MURMANSK AIRFIELD AT
APPROXIMATELY 3:30 A.M. LOCAL TIME, PROCEEDED DUE WEST
FROM MURMANSK OVER FINNISH BORDER, THEN DUE SOUTH TO
HELSINKI IN FINNISH AIR SPACE. TOON

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Message Attributes

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TAGS: EAIR, CASC, UR, (KIM CHANG KYU), (LEE KEUN SIK)
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